ASEAN Response to the COVID-19 in the Economic, Health, and Tourism Sector

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Abstract

ASEAN is a regional organization consisting of several countries in the Southeast Asia region. The aim of establishing ASEAN is to cooperate and create an atmosphere of peace in the Southeast Asian region. In 2020, the world will be shocked by a complicated problem, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. The author tries to see the impact caused by COVID-19 and the ASEAN response in dealing with the issues that occur. The author uses the literature study method by using several sources from websites, news portals, reports, press releases, and journals to assess these cases. From this research, we can see that each country’s problem consists of health, economic, and tourism problems. ASEAN’s response in facing this pandemic includes collaborating in determining policies, exchanging information on each country’s situation, and using tourism destination websites to restore the state of tourism in ASEAN.

I. INTRODUCTION

The organization is an association of human entities with a different boundary for each form and has a common purpose of being achieved or several different on each aim [1]. An organization has its respective purpose that is leading to give rise to varied organizations. ASEAN is one of the regional organizations consisting of 10 country members in Southeast Asia. In the introduction, we will explain the history of the ASEAN establishment.

The Cold War was one of the reasons for the formation of this organization. Uncertain circumstances and territorial struggles between groups often occur at the expense of other small countries. Two superpower countries, the United States and The Soviet Union, have a remarkable ability and power to control other small countries with their respective ideologies. In this period, several countries in the world are still experiencing a transition. World War II has caused various damages and certainly takes time to rebuild their country, especially in Southeast Asia. With the existence of an uncertain condition, it could significantly impact countries in the region; therefore, Southeast Asia tried to form associations to maintain regional and state stability. Maintaining regional carry-out stability would have a good impact on each country, and the obstacles passed together. ASEAN formed on August 8th, 1967, which resulted in the Bangkok Declaration as one of ASEAN’s foundations.

The purpose of establishing ASEAN is cooperation in various fields such as economy, social, culture, tourism, and others and maintain regional stability.
and preserve peace between countries in Southeast Asia. Therefore, each country has the responsibility to develop a corporation and support each other. Moreover, with these purposes, if there is a conflict that occurs, it must be resolved through peace and negotiations. At this time, ASEAN has developed into an increasingly broad organization with various forms of cooperation. At the beginning of 2020, there have been significant problems experienced by every country in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has spread in every country, including ASEAN members affected by this pandemic.

Economic growth will certainly be significantly affected by this pandemic. Based on data from cash, which took data from DBS, the first country to ban travel from China or to China was Singapore. Flight restriction aims to close the chain of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. With these restrictions, of course, this will significantly impact several sectors such as tourism. This restriction will reduce foreign tourists coming from outside and affect the country’s economy. However, in terms of policies, each country has its own policies to deal with this pandemic. Each country in ASEAN has its own strategy to solve the pandemic problem.

With these problems, researchers will conduct a study on the impact of the pandemic and ASEAN’s response in dealing with the pandemic this time. The discussion will include several things regarding the cooperation carried out by ASEAN in health, tourism, and the economy in the face of a pandemic (Kukuh Tejomurti, 2020: 685). Researchers at this time used a literature study research method that took some data from websites, media portals, and journals in examining ASEAN’s steps to face the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. METHODOLOGY

The author uses the literature study method by using several sources from websites, news portals, and journals in assessing these cases.

III. ANALYSIS

A. ASEAN Response

On 17 March 2020, WHO called on ASEAN countries to respond quickly with enthusiasm to the increasingly widespread Coronavirus pandemic. The call was stated by Dr. Poonam Khetrapa Singh, the Regional Director of WHO for the Southeast Asia region. It was uploaded on the official WHO pages. In that statement, Dr. Poonam Khetrapa Singh said, "The situation is evolving rapidly. We need to immediately scale up all efforts to prevent the virus from infecting more people" [2]. It can be ascertained that every country that has a COVID-19 case has the capacity or ability to detect the virus Corona using a different PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test; this is indicated by the number of deaths in each country in ASEAN [3]. Therefore, to anticipate the spread of the virus even more widely, WHO called for quick and swift action to ASEAN countries.

Then on 14 April 2020, ASEAN held a Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19, or what we usually know as the ASEAN Summit, which Vietnam hosted online. It discussed the strategy to overcome COVID-19 impact within ASEAN countries member. The Summit is also to respond to the WHO’s call that was made on 17 March 2020. Most of the discussion at the conference discussed the adverse effects caused by the Coronavirus on the economic sector in Southeast Asia. However, the conference also discusses the social and health impacts, particularly in the ASEAN region.
B. The Impact in the Economic Sector

In the economic sector, the Covid-19 pandemic had a great and significant impact, especially in ASEAN member countries. The effect that occurs, in general, is a decrease in the consumer buying capability for a product or service resulting in conditions in which an economy becomes sluggish or declines, for example, a decrease in the buying capability of a community for specific goods or a service such as the tourism industry. Several supporting factors, such as implementing lockdown policies for some countries, affected ASEAN’s economic downturn.

The so-called social distancing policy affects the consumption pattern like the community would prefer to reduce consumption outside of living quarters. The production of goods also affected the surplus of goods in several factories that are not comparable to sales. The lack of demand in the trading system has made some corporations reduce their production costs, such as laying off employees or laborers unilaterally or temporarily closing their production activities.

The impact of the pandemic that occurred, especially in the Southeast Asia region in the economic sector, will be further explained as follows:

There is a change in the economic growth of a country

This unpredictable event will have a high-speed transmission to almost the entire world, causing some countries confused to act and make new policies that are emergency in nature. It decreased the impact on changes in the projection economic growth of a nation.

From statistical data obtained by several sources such as The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and finance ministries from several countries, it shows how the Covid-19 pandemic has caused changes in projected economic growth in only a short time in 2020. Even developed countries like Singapore have experienced a decline, from 0.5% - 2.5% for the initial prediction to -0.5% - 1%, and had entered an era of economic recession in the country because Singapore is engaged in investment, import-export of goods, and a world provider of financial services [4].

International Trade Chain

Activities in international trade have also experienced a significant impact on ASEAN due to this pandemic. The ASEAN trade chain includes many partner countries who are both consumers and suppliers to various ASEAN member countries. The European Union, America, China as the largest producer and consumer countries in the world, are also the main trading partners for ASEAN, accounting for half (50.3%) of the total ASEAN trade across the globe, so that disruptions in trade activities will cause shortages or effects for these countries. In addition to disruptions that occur directly from the economic sector, such as decreasing demand, the government policies to reduce the trading capacity of a country external parties to prevent pandemic transmission can affect imbalances in the trade chain. As a result, several
countries experience shortages in materials imported from abroad and have resulted in a dwindling supply of goods and are not sufficient for them.

It is also feared that the logistics distribution chain will experience disruption due to several policies and new regulations set by the government to prevent the spread of this pandemic. Logistics distribution is crucial, considering that several companies and countries producing medical equipment and primary agricultural products are now at the forefront of dealing with this pandemic. When a problem occurs in the logistical distribution process, it will affect even the smallest social community structure.

**Business and Financial Disruption**

This pandemic caused several disruptions in a country’s finances, such as changes in ASEAN members’ currency value against the world currency unit and decreased several ASEAN shares’ values. It was triggered by the rapid flow of capital that led to a significant decline in global markets and short-term depreciation of exchange rates in several countries.

In the graph published by the official ASEAN website, several countries have depreciated their currency exchange rates against the USD, such as Thailand (Bath), Singapore (SD), and Indonesia (Rupiah). Indonesia, as the country most affected, experienced an increase in its currency in a short time. In January, it valued at IDR 13,662 per USD, and then it rose sharply around IDR 16,367 at the end of March with an increase of 19.8% [5].

Besides that, the impact of this pandemic has also greatly affected the stock market in ASEAN. Many businesses reduce and close part of their operations to reduce production costs to consider the risk of a deficit in their company earnings. On the other hand, investors are also worried that this pandemic will create an economic crisis and a global financial crisis so that the capital stored in investment will be withdrawn quickly to secure part of the corporation’s investment funds. This attitude was a very drastic decline in the value of the stock market, especially in ASEAN.

In the graph published by the official ASEAN website, several countries have accompanied the rapid flow of capital that led to a significant decline in global markets and short-term depreciation of exchange rates in several countries.

The data shows that there is a drastic decline that occurred in February when the Covid-19 epidemic. It changed its status to a pandemic and spread in various parts of the world until April. There was a sideways term where conditions on the stock market returned to flat but had not shown an increase or uptrend.
The smallest sector that is most affected

It continues to the smallest sector, such as daily workers, private employees, laborers, informal workers, and business service providers, including tourism services, which are significantly affected. As a result of several restrictions such as social distancing and lockdowns, some micro-economic actors experience decreased income. However, they must continue to pay the same production costs, causing several sectors to close without income and even terminate their work contracts with their employees unilaterally. This actually increases the unemployment rate to be quite sharp and indirectly reduces social stability. The high unemployment rate has resulted in some people finally looking for income sources by carrying out activities classified as criminal groups such as mugging, robbing, bullying, piracy, etc. If this case cannot be handled professionally, it will cause an area’s security to be disturbed. Even the ASEAN industry's tourism industry is disrupted due to these restrictions, even though this industry contributes at least 12.6% of the ASEAN economy (data of 2018).

C. Response and Policy

Recommendations in the Economic Sector

Therefore, as a regional organization, ASEAN conducts research and holds meetings for ASEAN member countries to state the impact of this pandemic, especially on the economic sector in the ASEAN region. The organization issues several policy recommendations and solutions to problems in the economic field, which can then be applied by member countries conditionally depending on the urgency of these member countries. Some of the policy recommendations given by ASEAN are as follows:

Maximizing all existing forms of macro, financial, and structural policies

The pandemic that occurred could not be predicted with accuracy by several countries. Therefore, to maximize control of this outbreak, several actions need to take. But it also has apparent consequences for the economy. The closure of factories, several industries, shopping places, and social restrictions resulted in a sharp decline in economic activity demand. To reduce the economic damage caused by this pandemic, the monetary regulations and enforcement for this reason urgently needed.

Moreover, the micro sector plays an essential role in the economic system but is also very vulnerable to instability. In a broader scope, updating policies and using all appropriate economic instruments is also expected to increase the economy's stability.

Maintaining production capacity in the economy

The government and economic actors must carefully prepare to restart economic activity when several social distancing and lockdown policies begin to be stretched or enter a transition period to a New Normal condition. By making a recovery plan to improve connectivity between countries, recovery in terms of the tourism industry is one of ASEAN’s most considerable economic income. One of the most crucial and essential steps aimed at a corporation is to temporarily postpone the obligation to pay debts to companies/industrial sectors affected by this condition. There is a smooth flow of capital in restarting the economy. In this way, economic actors’ production capacity can be maintained even though previously experiencing a decrease in total income, creating a condition in which the
competitive nature returns and increases to get out of a sluggish economic condition. In addition, countries members can monitor to protect workers, laborers, business people, MSMEs, and all affected production sectors.

**Paying attention to the distribution activities of the supply chain to be maintained:**

In managing an economy, ASEAN member countries are expected to keep the supply chain of essential goods such as agricultural products, food, medical equipment, etc. Still running smoothly without any obstacles in trade such as bureaucratic process and taxation. For this reason, they should review various obstacles while their application is in a crisis, so it does not disrupt the trade flow from producers to consumers. The other way is to calibrate the amount in taxation so that the flow of goods in and out, especially for goods deemed very important, can run without burdens. On the other hand, this can be advantageous for the country in the context of complementary goods needed. It is also crucial to maintain the supply flow of a product or goods, especially for some urgent items during this pandemic, such as medical devices, food sources, and agricultural products. Efforts to facilitate trade activities can be carried out as the main spearhead to support creating a stable social community structure during this pandemic. For example, protecting workers engaged in logistics distribution, then handling and safeguarding crucial infrastructures such as ports, airports, and container handling, creating a smooth flow of logistics despite some restrictions in place in some areas. Then it can be optimized by continuing to open the ASEAN market for international trade activities with its trading partners, especially focusing on supply chain activities in the region.

**Utilization of technology and social media**

The government’s policies should overcome its citizen’s mobility limitation by using digital technology in trading activities. This step was taken to reduce sluggishness in economic activity because people who were still worried about leaving the house to shop at physical stores and avoiding crowds finally chose to shop online via e-commerce and social media such as Instagram, Facebook, etc. In trading activities, the public is also advised to look at digital assets or cryptocurrencies, which during these conditions have the least impact due to the ongoing pandemic. It can be seen from the price for Bitcoin assets, which in March to April has decreased, but in the short term, it has increased by 200%. If the community can take advantage of this facility, they will still get income even during this crisis. The government also needs to continue to support digital trade facilities by increasing cybersecurity so that digital economic activities can run optimally.

**Making social protection for the community**

In this condition, many people lose their jobs because of decisions from their companies, especially for people in the middle to the lower level with fewer money savings. The ability to survive in this period without a job is challenging. For this reason, it is hoped that ASEAN member countries can rearrange policies towards pro-people such as health insurance, medical treatment, and free health services for people who are vulnerable to disease and the low-class economy. It is used to create social stability in the community to survive during the pandemic until an undetermined time.
Increase pandemic response regionally

ASEAN member countries are always expected to increase their response to macroeconomic stability and needs, such as supply chain connectivity between countries to minimize the impact on a long-term basis. Joint preparation in building and restoring the economy is a step that must be immediately regulated in its realization so that the economic downturn does not drag on or even gets worse because there is no thorough preparation for economic recovery policies. On the other hand, to deal with the health and economic sectors, they must allocate non-essential expenditures and budgets. Both sectors are the most crucial areas in this pandemic period.

D. ASEAN Response to Health

In the health sector, several points are emphasized in the discussion of handling the Coronavirus pandemic at the conference, which is contained in the Final Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit. In this discussion of health, the researcher’s focus is on point 9 of the declaration, where the discussion is further divided into seven sub-points, including recommendations from ASEAN for its member countries. However, in the discussion regarding health management in ASEAN, there are three sub-points related to health, namely sub-points 1 to 3. The following is the discussion of the three sub-points.

The first point, ASEAN recommended its member countries to increase cooperation in health affairs to overcome the pandemic and protect the community. Cooperation on these points includes the exchange of information, transparency regarding the situation that has occurred in each country related to the pandemic, and the steps taken by each country in ASEAN. ASEAN strongly recommended cooperation in increasing the public health system’s capacity and the health of the medical workforce in member countries, given each member country’s different capabilities in dealing with this pandemic. The intensification of cooperation in providing drugs and medical devices is also an essential point. ASEAN also advised member countries to increase their preparedness and rapid response to this pandemic. The second point is that ASEAN prioritized people’s welfare in a pandemic situation and provided assistance and support to affected ASEAN countries. Apart from that, ASEAN also encouraged member countries to provide emergency assistance to member countries experiencing a crisis. The third point, ASEAN, encouraged improving effective communication in various forms, including the government’s policies, information related to public health and safety, justification of misinformation, and efforts to reduce lousy stigma and discrimination. This aimed to increase the strength of cooperation between member countries [2].

In implementing the recommendations put forward by ASEAN, the following is a brief discussion regarding implementing the recommendations in ASEAN member countries. On 2 April 2020, Indonesia implemented a temporary ban on foreign tourists visiting the country to prevent Coronavirus transmission. This regulation is contained in the Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation number 11 of 2020 concerning the temporary prohibition of foreigners entering Indonesian territory. However, from this regulation, there are six exceptions, namely foreigners who have a limited and permanent stay permit, diplomatic and service visa holders,
diplomatic and service residence permit holders, aid workers or medical support workers based on humanitarian reasons, transportation equipment crews, and foreigners who work on strategic state-owned projects. However, this still requires special requirements, such as a health certificate issued by the respective health institutions, two weeks in an area free of the Coronavirus, and a statement of willingness to be quarantined for two weeks [7].

Nevertheless, before that, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, implemented the PSBB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions). In a press conference held on 31 March 2020, President Jokowi said, "We have decided in the cabinet meeting that the option we choose is large-scale social restrictions or PSBB," and this PSBB is contained in Law number 6 of 2018, regarding health quarantine [8]. In the implementation of the PSBB, all learning activities in school and lectures are temporarily stopped and transferred to online learning. Several economic activities also had a temporary halt at the start of the implementation of the PSBB. Unlike Indonesia, Vietnam has implemented LockDown.

Reporting from CNBC Indonesia, Vietnam has zero deaths. This is due to the government's quick response, strict tracking and quarantine, and the effectiveness of delivering information to the public. According to Pham Quang Thai, as Deputy Head of the Infection Control Department at the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, he said, "We are not just waiting for guidelines from WHO. We use the data we collect from outside and inside to decide what action to take early". On 23 January 2020, only two positive Coronavirus cases were recorded from the same site in Vietnam. Then on 1 February 2020, Vietnam declared a national epidemic condition. At that time, six confirmed cases were recorded. Then on 12 February 2020, Vietnam carried out a lockdown on the North Hanoi area for 20 days, after cases increased to 7 people [9]. This is done by Vietnam very quickly so that it can reduce the number of Coronavirus transmissions.

On the other hand, Singapore received praise from WHO for its "All-Government approach", preparedness, and speed in handling cases similar to Vietnam's. Singapore is also using technology to follow up on infected people and stop transmission. From these efforts, Singapore found 160 cases, 93 of them were repatriated to their home countries, and the rest were given intensive care. As a result, there were no deaths in the country [3].

Malaysia also carried out a LockDown after receiving a high increase in cases, from 125 to 553 cases a day. From this spike in cases, Malaysia closed its borders, restricted internal movement, and closed several shopping centers [11]. Then the Philippines also closed the entire island of Luzon until 15 May 2020. Under the LockDown, Luzon Island residents were only allowed to access primary needs, and public transportation is also suspended. The suspension of public transportation included transportation services, such as Grab. In this effort, the Philippine government facilitates residents who have gone through quarantine and residents who will buy primary needs by providing local government transportation units, and for people who want to leave the island were given 72 hours. After that access in and out of the Luzon Island was restricted. The Philippine government also closed all economic activities, except for those that provide primary needs [4].

E. Obstacles to the Health Sector

There are still countries that still lack adequate medical personnel, PPE
(Personal Protective Equipment), and facilities to provide essential care for patients affected by the Coronavirus. As said by the chairman of the Bogor City IDI on 22 March 2020, to the journalist VIVAnews, he admitted that PPE was inadequate. Still, the shortage was related to the number of patients and several other factors [9]. However, over time, the amount of PPE stock has increased dramatically [14]. Then at the beginning of the Coronavirus entry in Indonesia, there was a crisis where several hospitals appointed by the Indonesian government to handle Coronavirus cases could not accommodate more patients. With this incident, the government responded quickly by changing the Wisma Atlet function which was initially a temporary residence for athletes and is now an Emergency Hospital on 23 March 2020 [11]. The Philippine government is also experiencing similar difficulties with Indonesia. The Philippine government has limited testing for Covid-19 due to the already congested health system. With these conditions, the Philippine government has a discourse to expand its power by entering into the private sector, such as taking over telecommunications networks, forcing hotels and other places to accommodate medical personnel, etc. The Malaysian government opened 400 new sites that are used to treat Coronavirus patients. The place consists of the State University, Community college, training center, and others owned by the government. Then the Mercy Malaysia organization created the “Covid-19 Pandemic Fund” program to help medical personnel meet the crucial needs of marginalized groups in Malaysia. Unlike the governments of other member countries, Thailand has formed a command center to manage the Coronavirus situation occurring within the country. From this initiative, the Thai government succeeded in supplying 1,000,000 masks, 1,500,000 N95 masks, and 1,900,000 PPE, which were distributed throughout the region [12].

F. ASEAN Response Related to Tourism

Tourism is one of the sectors that has been heavily impacted due to restrictions imposed by each country. In Singapore, alone tourists from China contribute around one million people every month to the tourism sector. Meanwhile, in Indonesia itself, based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, it was stated that the number of tourists last March dropped drastically. It was stated that tourism was the sector most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In last March, foreign tourists fell drastically by 64.11 percent when compared to March last year. Meanwhile, compared to the previous month, foreign tourists experienced a decrease of 45.5 percent compared to February [13]. Based on these data, the decline in foreign tourists will also impact the country’s economy, GDP will decline, and impact the other sectors.

With the decline in the tourism sector, specific steps need to be taken to revive the sector. In this case, ASEAN, of course, as a regional organization, has taken several steps in taking action in the tourism sector. One of the steps taken was to hold a virtual meeting on 29 April 2020. This meeting aimed to solve tourism problems and produce several points of cooperation to see the development of each country. The result of this meeting resulted in seven points [14]. The first point is about coordination regarding each country’s health standard requirements that are needed in controlling the spread of the outbreak. In this case, the ASEAN Tourism Crisis Communication team (ATCCT) is tasked with carrying out this. It is necessary to
prepare health protocols regarding transportation between regions or countries.

The second point resulting from the meeting was to increase cooperation between national tourism organizations and fields related to the current situation, such as health, transportation, and other fields, to form clear cooperation to deal with the Covid-19 problem and overcome the spread. As a government, of course, it requires support from its citizens. Therefore, cooperation is needed between the government and national tourism organizations to implement mitigation regarding the spread of Covid-19 in tourist attractions. The third point is about increasing information on taking appropriate steps from each country. This is necessary to see the effectiveness of these measures and see the possibility of implementation in each country.

The fourth point is about the willingness of governments of all ASEAN countries to increase tourists’ trust regarding health and safety protocols related to the current pandemic situation. This aimed at restoring the tourism sector and restoring related industries such as travel, buses, hotels, and others. The fifth point is regarding the goal of tourism recovery, namely “ASEAN as a single tourism destination,” so every country agrees to support each other to restore each country’s situation.

The sixth point is regarding each country’s policies related to the economy. Each country agrees to immediately implement macro and microeconomic policies to support the transportation and tourism industry, such as financial assistance policies and other policies that support tourism. The last point is regarding the cooperation that must be implemented immediately to restore post-crisis tourism. This cooperation is created with related fields to resolve problems related to tourism recovery immediately.

From these points, we can see that ASEAN, as a regional organization, has carried out cooperation in the form of mutual strengthening from within each country and exchanging information related to each country’s pandemic situation. In addition to these efforts, in the continuation of the meeting on June 4, 2020, it was agreed that ASEAN at this time would carry out cooperation in the form of one-way promotional media, namely through the visitseasia.travel website. On the website, information is related to the state of tourism in each country. Also, this website also contains tourist attractions from each country, which are expected through this website that foreign tourists can be interested in tourist attractions. Apart from being a promotional media, this website is also used to provide information regarding each country’s situation regarding the ongoing pandemic. The purpose of establishing this website is related to promotion, which still considers each country’s situation, related to the health and security protocols of each country. On this website, there are also some suggestions regarding travel that must follow health and safety protocols. The efforts made by each country in overcoming the pandemic problem are also explained in order to provide peace to tourists to revive the tourism sector.

As previously stated, ASEAN countries will help each other in restoring the situation. We will explain the cooperation plans undertaken by several ASEAN countries to restore tourism. One of the steps that are planned to be implemented is the travel bubble. This plan is carried out by reopening international flights that will be followed by steps to provide facilities and provisions according to current conditions. The travel bubble is implemented between two countries that have agreed to open flights. Reported
from detik.com, Malaysia has planned to open cooperation with other countries in ASEAN, one of them is Indonesia [15]. Apart from Indonesia, Malaysia is also planning this with other countries, there are Brunei Darussalam and Singapore [16]. This plan certainly has challenges, as this pandemic has not yet experienced a decline in several countries. Therefore, the travel bubble will be implemented with an agreement between the two countries that consider each country’s health aspects. With this agreement, it is hoped that tourism’s growth and recovery can gradually restore the situation. In this regard, the efforts made are one of the steps in building and restoring the situation to lead to “ASEAN as Single Tourism Destination”.

IV. CONCLUSION
As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN has built integration among its member countries to withstand these crisis conditions. As we know in the discussion above, policies and collaborative policies between countries have made ASEAN and its members survive to this day. Likewise, in health, ASEAN countries are also actively exchanging related information to reduce the virus’s spread. Then in the tourism sector, to reach a single tourism destination, ASEAN has created a website that contains information related to tourist attractions and the conditions of each country to build the trust of foreign tourists.

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